



Avoiding Disaster During Change **More Success with Less Stress**

“Any change, even for the better, is always accompanied by drawbacks and discomforts.” -Arnold Bennett

Change is inevitable and everywhere. Experts tell us that 85% of all products and services we are now using will be obsolete in 5 years. 10 years after their graduation, 80% of college students are working in something totally unrelated to their college degree. With these staggering figures it is obvious that we are more controlled by change than us controlling it. The Number 1 request I receive when associations call about presentation topics is Change/Transition. Everyone is looking for a way to not only make the changes successful, but make them less stressful. So how do you avoid a “train wreck”, as I heard one national leader comment? What do you do to make the inevitable changes your organization must go through to grow and stay ahead of the competition? Are there common steps to make change productive and even invigorating? Here are 8 ways (and a bonus) to avoid disaster during change.

1. Recruit with scrupulous **honesty**. Get people on your side by telling the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Don't hold anything back. Cast your vision leaving no stone unturned. Find people who will stand with you so that when the chips are down no one who is on your side will be able to say you misled them. Be careful who you talk to. Find the hardest people to convince first. This way they are in on the decision and the information. This makes recruiting the easiest followers even simpler (saves the best job for last). While recruiting tell you vision. Reveal the pitfalls you anticipate. Express what is on your heart. Leave yourself open. By being honest it will encourage your recruits to be open and honest with you. You will need their support when the going gets rough.
2. Build support among **like-minded** people. Who can you trust? Seek out people who are discontented with the status quo in the same way or for the same reasons you are. Wander among your people and ask questions that bring out the discontent they are suffering. “Are you satisfied with the programs we are doing?”, “Are we getting the results you feel we could if we put forth our best effort?”, “How would you change things if you had the opportunity?” Take notes and find those who agree with you. Then talk about the vision you have and the bright future everyone will enjoy together. Include their comments and suggestions where you can to build support.
3. Whenever possible, make only **one** change at a time. People can only take so much change. After several moves even the most supportive individual needs to stop and take a breath. Making one change at a time allows the new habits to sink in and adjustments to be made. It also allow for preparation for the next change. In my Adapting to Change presentations I use an exercise where we have participants pair off and make several successive changes. Some complain on the first round. Over half complain on the second round. No one will even attempt the third round – which I immediately use to make my first point. Too much change makes everyone grumpy. Remember the personality styles of your staff and that not everyone reacts favorable to change. Some need time to prepare or get over the experience. Make transitions gradual and more people will follow you.

4. Keep the basic **issues** clear. Remember why the changes are being made in the first place. During every transition period there is a time of confusion. Other issues are brought up that may not even relate to the goal you have set for the organization. Objections will be made and your followers will wonder, “Why are we doing this in the first place?” This is the time to constantly re-cast the vision and keep it in front of your people. There is disturbance and people will try to get away with whatever they can to take advantage of the tumult created by the transition. Keep everyone focused on the goal. Talk about the basic issues and the original discontent that your strongest followers expressed when the process began.
5. Know the **territory**. Never lead without knowing where you are going. Always keep your own personal “road map” in front of you. When uncertainty arises, it will benefit your people that you expected it and can still lead them through the wilderness. Moses knew there was a desert between Egypt and the Promised Land. Columbus knew the ocean was big when he set out for the New World. Patton studies Rommel’s tactics before going into battle with him. All three knew the territory they were going to pass through at the outset of their journeys. Wise leaders can anticipate the next three moves and know where the river is shallowest to cross.
6. Seek to make changes by **addition**. Everyone equates change with loss. We think first about what we are going to lose. Remember Windows 3.1? When Windows 95 came on the market it didn’t fare well in sales because no one wanted to lose their “windows.” They didn’t want to lose the File Menu (now known as the “Explore” menu when you Right-Click the “Start” button. they had gotten used to Microsoft learned they had to sell the advantages and the benefits in the new programming. People are more prone to accept change when you sell the benefits to them. It helps them focus on “gain” rather than “loss.” Think about basic changes you have been forced to make. If you didn’t initiate the changes you thought first about what you would miss. Your people will, too.
7. Avoid **future** shock. Don’t change things so quickly that everyone is stunned into inactivity, revolt or shock. Remember as you make one change at a time, do so gradually. Allow time for adjustment but don’t move so far into the new transition that no one is with you. John Maxwell says, “A leader who gets so far ahead of his/her followers becomes a target.” History bears this out. One night in 1863 at the battle of Chancellorsville, Confederate General Stonewall Jackson went out with a small patrol to reconnoiter the battle field. On his return a Confederate sentry thought he was the enemy and shot him. He died of his wound days later.
8. Change is **most effective** when those **most affected** are involved in the planning. Learners learn best when they are involved in the learning process. People are most motivated when they are involved in the change process. Involve as many in the planning and execution of your changes. Allow everyone to buy in and have ownership from the very beginning as you cast vision. Let it be their vision. Remember how you looked for discontent? How you enlisted with scrupulous honesty? This is where it pays off in your people’s involvement in the dream and the transition process. Celebrate victories and make the celebrations worthwhile. Reward those who have put forth the most effort (particularly, the ones “behind the scenes”).

Bonus: Use the **Four Levels of Change** as your formula:

- **Knowledge** - Begin by educating everyone as to what the change is about and what the results/benefits will be. Why do we need to change? What do your people need to know?
- **Attitude** - Encourage a culture of change and anticipation. Get your motivators working for you.
- **Behavior** - Next behavior will change as positive attitudes influence the organization’s culture.
- **Organization** - Finally you will see organizational change take place as behaviors become habits and the team is marching along to a new beat. Unfortunately most organizations start by changing the organization, forcing new behaviors, trying to change negative attitudes, and finally, educating as a last resort.

When change comes, it doesn't have to be a disaster, or a "train wreck." It can be the most invigorating process your organization goes through if you cast a bold vision, carefully plan your steps, execute with determination and take it one step at a time.

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